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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002994

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2016  
TAGS: MOPS PINS KISL RP  
SUBJECT: UNEASY TRUCE IN MAGUINDANAO

REF: A. MANILA 2833  
1B. MANILA 740

Classified By: Pol/C Scott Bellard for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. A week-old truce brokered by GRP officials between the Maguindanao Provincial Governor and local commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) appears to be holding, with thousands of displaced persons now returning to their homes. The Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) has been frustrated not to have been able to play a more active role, but is now present and helpful. The GRP and MILF Coordinating Committees for the Cessation of Hostilities were directly involved in the negotiations and the current truce. Further outbreaks of violence from the long-standing rido (feud) between the Ampatuan clan and elements of the MILF remain a strong possibility, underscoring the need for a strengthened mandate for the IMT and the potential pitfalls of the peace process ahead. DCM will meet with local officials and IMT leaders in Cotabato City during the week of July 24. End Summary.

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Peace, of sorts  
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¶2. (C) Following the personal involvement of Presidential Advisor for the Peace Process Jesus "Jess" Dureza (ref A), Maguindanao Provincial Governor Andal Ampatuan and the MILF's Coordinating Committee for the Cessation of Hostilities (CCCH) Chairman Von Al Haq signed a truce agreement on July 11, setting up a demilitarized buffer zone with monitoring posts in the municipalities of Shariff Aguak, Unsay Ampatuan, Datu Saudi Ampatuan, and Mamasapano to prevent further clashes between Ampatuan's militia and the MILF 105th Base Command. Also signing the agreement were Von Al Haq's GRP/CCCH counterpart, Chairman Ramon Santos, and the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) 6th Infantry Division Chief Rodolfo Obaniana, with IMT Chief-of-Mission Dato Pahlawan Soheimi Bin Abbas as a witness.

¶3. (C) Although the GRP/CCCH had sought the establishment of a "no firearms zone," the two sides could not agree on this. Instead, MILF members who are actual residents in the conflict affected areas may still keep their firearms, but may not display them in public. However, the agreement stipulated that any MILF forces who are not actual residents in these areas must leave (with their weapons).

¶4. (U) Since the signing of the agreement, between 15,000 and 20,000 displaced persons (4000 families) have begun to leave evacuation centers to return home. However, at least two hundred houses were destroyed or damaged during the fighting. Many of the displaced now face the prospect of having to rebuild or to seek refuge with family or friends as

their lives return to "normal." IMT troops are now present in key areas to ensure that both sides respect the agreement.

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Stronger Mandate for the IMT  
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15. (C) According to Executive Director of the GRP Peace Panel Secretariat Ryan Sullivan, IMT Chief-of-Mission Dato Pahlawan Soheimi Bin Abbas and his team were frustrated and disappointed over the following developments:

--- the alleged failure of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) 6th Infantry Division to act decisively on joint IMT-CCCH recommendations quickly to diffuse the armed conflict that began on June 28;

--- the inability of the IMT to gain entry into conflict affected areas until July 7; and,

--- deliveries of Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Department of Social Welfare and Development relief assistance to organizations affiliated with Governor Ampatuan rather than directly to the general populace in conflict affected areas.

16. (C) IMT and GRP officials have separately commented that the conflict underscored the need to strengthen the IMT's mandate to address conflicts between the MILF and traditional elites such as the Ampatuans. The IMT Secretariat, GRP/CCCH, and MILF/CCCH intend to discuss this issue further.

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Partition of Maguindanao?

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17. (C) According to one Malacanang contact, the proposed creation of a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity in the wake of an eventual peace accord might threaten Governor Ampatuan's power base and economic interests, particularly in the second district of Maguindanao, where there are untapped deposits of petroleum and natural gas (ref B). While most of the current mayors within the second district are immediate family members/relatives of Governor Ampatuan, two MILF camps legally recognized by the GRP are also in the area -- Camp Bader and Camp Omar. The latter of these camps houses the MILF 105th Base Command.

18. (C) Governor Ampatuan has reportedly initiated a proposal to divide Maguindanao province into two, which the ARMM Regional Assembly discussed a week before the June 23 bomb blast. Observers have predicted that, in the event of a GRP-MILF peace agreement, the Ampatuan-dominated province would opt out of a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity in the eventual plebiscite.

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Comment:  
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19. (C) DCM and poloff will travel to the area on July 24 and meet with the IMT and local officials in Cotabato City to assess the current situation. Clearly, the long-standing rido (feud) between the Ampatuan clan and elements of the MILF is far from over, despite the current truce. As the GRP-MILF peace process moves forward, it will likely become ever more critical to have an IMT on-the-ground with a stronger mandate to address conflicts between the MILF and traditional ruling elite over land and natural resources.

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Kenney